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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Asad's Speech, Syria/Britain,
Israel/Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Iraq (8/17)

11. Summary: Syrian papers reported that the Syrian Cabinet stressed that President Asad's address to 4th General Conference of the Syrian Journalists Union reflected the impulse of the Syrian people and all the Arab nation and expressed the Arab street's support for the Lebanese national resistance. "With its strategic inclinations, the speech has outlined future moves by emphasizing the constants of steadfastness and resistance as the only legitimate means to restore rights and achieve just and comprehensive peace in the region," the Cabinet emphasized in its weekly session headed by Premier Mohammad Naji Ottri. The Cabinet hailed "the steadfastness of the Lebanese resistance and its honorable victory against the brutal Israeli aggression that restored the Umma's honor and dignity and destroyed the myth that the Israeli army is invincible." The Cabinet added that "the Resistance's victory also foiled the New Middle East project that aims to establish US-Israeli hegemony in the region and to deprive the Arab people of their rights and identity."

Papers also reported that Information Minister Bilal said in a televised statement that President Asad's speech expressed the Arab people's dignity and talked about the stage of resistance, asserting that the new Middle East will be as Syria wants but not the Middle East of chaos, destruction and aggression. Answering a question on Syria's criticism of the positions of some Arab countries regarding the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, Dr. Bilal said "Syria is tied by fraternal relations with the Arab countries," confirming deep-rooted and strong relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. He added that Syria has always hoped that all Arabs would stand by Syria in the battle for a just peace that guarantees Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab lands. The Minister noted that Syria has always defended legitimate Arab issues, underlining the country's stance in the face of the fierce campaign that accuses the Arab and Islamic nations of terrorism or fascism. Dr. Bilal said that the resistance victory is a victory for Arab dignity, for the Arab nation and for Lebanon. He criticized those who called immediately after the cease-fire for disarmament of Hizbollah, even though the Israeli Foreign Minister had stressed that there is no power in the world able to disarm it. Dr. Bilal said the whole world knows that Syria had put an end to the civil war in

Lebanon, stopped the inner bleeding in Lebanon and supported Lebanon's unity and sovereignty. He also pointed out the Syrian government's and people's stances regarding the Lebanese people during the Israeli aggression on Lebanon as proof of the unity of fate of the two people.

On Syrian-British relations, all papers reported that Syrian Minister of Information Bilal conferred with Chris Doyle, Director of the Council for British-Arab Understanding. The two discussed means of boosting dialogue between the Arab and British peoples in order to find common understanding of events in the Middle East. During the meeting, Minister Bilal confirmed the important role of Arab media and other institutions concerned with dialogue among civilizations to narrow the gap between the Syrian and British peoples and convey the true image of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Doyle said that British public opinion sympathizes with Arab issues, but more efforts should be made to reinforce this feeling through dialogue and visits, adding that everyone who visits Syria leaves with a good impression.
End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"The Cabinet hails the Lebanese Resistance's steadfastness and its honorable victory: President Asad's speech reflects the Arab street's opinion" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/17)

"Information Minister underscores the importance of enhancing Arab-British dialogue in order to create mutual understanding" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/17)

"Lebanese President: It is a shame to talk about disarming the resistance while our martyrs' blood is still on the ground. Israel is violating UN resolution 1701 by maintaining the siege against Lebanon" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/17)

"The Bush administration proposes to help disarm Hezbollah. The Lebanese government decides to send the Lebanese army to the South. Annan: disarming Hezbollah is not a task for international forces" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/17)

"Repercussions of failure interact in Israel. An investigation committee is established. Israeli Chief of Staff Dan Haluts is atop the list of Israeli officials to be investigated" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/17)

"Tens are killed or wounded in Baghdad attacks. Basra and Mosul witness more clashes" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/17)

"Three Palestinians martyred in the Gaza Strip. Palestinians consult to form a national Palestinian unity government. Egypt offers a new proposal to release the captured Israeli soldier" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/17)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Why this Hatred?"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/17): "Despite the huge destruction of Lebanese infrastructure, and despite the hundreds of martyrs and wounded and displaced people in the terrorist Israeli aggression on Lebanon, President Bush said hours after the ceasefire: "The war between Israel and Hizbollah was part of the struggle between freedom and terror."

"Bush once again claimed that the brutal aggression that Israel launched against Lebanon was a result of Hizbollah's capture of the two Israeli soldiers. He said Hizbollah, which attacked Israel, was defeated in the battle!

"Although Israeli official and media circles admitted that Israel was defeated in the aggression on Lebanon and that the valiant national resistance inflicted a miserable defeat on the

occupation forces, what is important is that the United States, which supported the war militarily and politically, counted heavily on its forward policeman in the region to implement its colonial plans. But the policeman stood impotent before the will of the owners of the land and the cause, and he failed to achieve what the US Administration was hoping to achieve in Lebanon first and in the region second.

"If President Bush is disturbed by the results of the brutal Israeli aggression, then this is his problem. But his repeated claim that the victim is the terrorist and the aggressor is the freedom fighter no longer fools anyone in the world, except the followers of the American-Zionist policy who still claim that Israel is an oasis of democracy and freedom in the Middle East, while those around it are 'barbarians' who have no connection with civilization.

"At the end of the day, no one in our region cares about Bush's opinion and extremist positions in support of the Israeli aggression. What matters is the result, which proved that the national resistance waged the most honorable fight against Israel and taught it a lesson it will not forget. As for the 'heroic' Israeli acts, they were against women, children, and old people in their homes, and against Lebanese roads and bridges. History will undoubtedly record what the resistance did in its bright pages, and it will record nothing but shame and disgrace for the aggressors."

"Bush Refuses to Acknowledge Defeat"

Hanan Hamad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/17): "President Bush was not expected to admit that Israel suffered a bitter military defeat in Lebanon. Over six years of his rule, Bush has never admitted his repeated defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq or even in his open war on what he calls terrorism. How, then, can he concede defeat in the war that Israel launched on his behalf...?"

"Perhaps the most dangerous thing in Bush's twisted vision about the results of the Lebanon war is that he has failed to learn the lessons of the repeated defeats and reconsider the reckless policies that his administration has adopted toward the Arab and Islamic region. These reckless policies are a result of the lack of balance between Washington's formidable military and material power and the modest mental abilities that control the power. These modest mental abilities made the head of the US Administration and his aides and advisers think that the war against the Resistance in Lebanon would be inexpensive and would bring huge benefits. The fact that Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld talk about success in Lebanon indicates that the adventurist mentality that governs the US administration continues to push them to make more mistakes...."

"A New Era"

Ali Qasim, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/17): "A new era has emerged in the Middle East after Hizbollah's victory...."

"Assessments might agree or disagree, but in the end they acknowledge the victory of the Resistance and see it as the most important transformation in the region, on the basis of which a new Middle East will be built. This was one of the facts that President Asad mentioned in his speech.... The new era, the era of Resistance, has abolished the myths that the official Arab fear created.

"The Resistance continued the series of its surprises even after the victory, when it announced on the day it fulfilled its 'True Promise', that it will reconstruct what the barbaric war

and the rancorous aggression destroyed.... The achievements of the Resistance, during and after the war, contemplate thus setting another precedent through which the features of the new Middle East are drawn as desired by the will of those who stood fast, bore the burden, and were stronger than tyranny, not as planned by the United States, Israel, and those who move in their orbit....

"This is why we see all this activity and these attempts by the defeated parties to compensate for what they missed or to correct what they misread, in parallel with their determination to beautify the face of a defeat whose features no one in the world can change, a defeat that is exploding into crises that will not be confined to Israel, but that will also affect all the parties to the defeat, including the United States, where voices critical of the logic of war are growing louder than ever before."

"Hysteria of Defeat"

Dr. Sa'id Musallam, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/17): "The violent Israeli air raids and attacks against Lebanon during the last day of the war were a manifestation of the hysteria of defeat.... Israel will not let Lebanon get away with its victory. Israel will certainly use trickery and devious ways, as well as its influence with the proponents of the New Middle East plan, to take revenge against Lebanon and its resistance. It is a new wave of circumvention

aimed at pushing Lebanon into the trap and playing the tunes of partition, sectarianism, and division of the unified national position. This mission will be delegated to followers and agents in the hope they will be able to do what the Zionist military machine failed to do. Here, there is need for caution and vigilance...."

Corbin